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Transcript of Reagan Interview on a Range of Foreign Issues

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 11 — Following is a transcript of an interview with President Reagan today by Bernard Weinraub, Hedrick Smith, Leslie H. Gelb and Gerald M. Boyd, all of the Washington Bureau, as transcribed by The New York Times:

Policy on Nicaragua

Q. Could we talk about Nicaragua? There seems to be a stalemate there. You're not providing aid to the contras now. There are no negotiations that are going on now. What are you planning to do in the way of policy to try to get something going that might bring about the kind of Nicaragua that you would like?

A. Well, I'm going to continue to ask the Congress to let us and all of Latin America go forward with the kind of program that was born of the Kissinger-led commission down there, in which 75 percent of the help we offer is going to be in social and economic aid to try and make these countries more self-sufficient and eliminate the great poverty in so many of those countries by simply helping them become more viable economically, and at the same time giving them help and security so that they're not victims of subversion, particularly from outside of their own countries.

But with regard to Nicaragua, I think that we should continue to offer support to the people of Nicaragua who have been betrayed in the revolution that they themselves supported. That revolution was supposed to be — result in democracy. And with the — the assurances were given by the people fighting the revolution — leading it. Then the Sandinistas did what Castro before them had done in Cuba. Once the revolution was successful, they ousted from the Government — or any participation in the Government — all the other factions that were dedicated to democracy — and have instituted a totalitarian regime. And what the Nicaraguan people want is the revolution they fought for. And I think they are entitled to have it.

Q. So support to the people of Nicaragua is support to the contras? Or what?

A. Well, they certainly are part of the people, and they were part of the revolution in many instances. The thing that so many people that are arguing against this don't seem to be aware of — the difference, for example, Nicaragua and El Salvador. El Salvador now, after several elections, is a Government that is striving for democracy that was chosen by the people. And the people trying to overthrow — the guerrillas in El Salvador — are trying to overthrow a Government that the majority of the people elected. In Nicaragua, the so-called Sandinista Government is a Government that seized power out of the barrel of a gun — it's never been chosen by the people. And it has directly contravened the principles of the revolution they were fighting, and I think there's every reason for the contras to be representing those who continue to strive for the democracy, which they fought a revolution to get.

Q. Are you talking about a fundamental change in the Nicaraguan Government? Or can they do things incrementally? Can they, for example, ease up on press freedom, or can they provide more press freedom, or can they provide certain steps that you might think would be acceptable without making a fundamental change in their government?

A. Well, Gerry, I don't know what, when we talk about this, are we talking about the people that are in the Government? Who form the Government? If it's the people, obviously those who have grabbed power are not going to want to give it up. That's typical of totalitarians. As for the other part — all the Sandinistas would have to do is go back to what they themselves participated in — promising to the Organization of American States that they wanted democracy, they wanted free voting, they wanted free labor unions, they wanted a free press — and, subject themselves, or submit themselves, I should say, and anyone else who chooses to, to the will of the people, by way of elections and voting.

Q. Sir, let me ask you, on the contras question, what form of aid should this take in terms of helping the contras? I mean, how do we propose to help the contras?

A. Well, I think what we — I still believe in covert programs where they're necessary and where they're desirable. And so, once you say that, then there are some limits as to what you can specify.

Q. Right. I understand.

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EXCERPTED